06 20220515 Philippians 2:5-11 Kenosis, a Model of Humility

Unity Through Humility

2 Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, [2] fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. [3] Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. [4] Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. (Philippians 2:1-4, NKJV).

Let's pray.

Wednesday night we analyzed these four verses in detail. Paul is telling us that unity is near to the heart of God, and that unity in the church is achieved through unselfish loyal love which we must have for one another. Paul told the church, "fulfill my joy by being like-minded." He loved this little church and he just wanted its members to walk in one mind as they walked in the Spirit. He is telling us how to live our lives in a way that is not ego-centric, but rather to walk in a manner like Jesus who humbled Himself in obedience, even obedience unto the cross. We too are to walk in unity. That is the essence of being a community of faith.

In that first paragraph, Paul tells us exactly how that kind of unity is achieved. We will never have more unity by just saying, "WE'RE GOING TO BE MORE UNIFIED." It is not something that we work up to. Paul gives us the perfect formula of what brings about unity and it is not all about any of us individually. *[3] Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but* ***in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. [4] Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.*** *(Philippians 2:3-4, NKJV).*

The Christian life is all about love. That's the hard part. The easier part for most of us is receiving Christ's love by grace. He paid it all. However, the "working it out" is done only through the empowerment and indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Paul then shows us a model of what this God-like love looks like. He shows us exactly how it worked with Jesus coming to earth. It is a matter of laying aside our rights and privileges in deferring to others in the church. The challenge is to let our minds be the same mind as was also in Christ Jesus.

The Humbled and Exalted Christ

[5] Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, [6] who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, [7] but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. [8] And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the

cross. [9] Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, [10] that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, [11] and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11, NKJV).

This piece of scripture is fascinating; many scholars think that it was an ancient hymn sung by the earliest Christians. In the earliest manuscripts that have been found, it is emboldened and indented, in the form of poetry. We don't know if Paul actually wrote this through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, or whether it was already a hymn. It most likely was a hymn being sung by the Christian Jews in Jerusalem, and Paul was reciting it for the Philippian church. It is a clear declaration of the deity of Jesus Christ. He was "in the form of God" but He didn't hang on to the right to hold that. He released it. He "emptied" Himself. He poured Himself out. He did this by taking on the form of a servant in the "likeness of a man."

Paul challenges us to do as He did, and to "empty" ourselves. So, what exactly are we to empty ourselves of? Well, it hurts to say it, but we must empty ourselves of SELF. My self gets in the way all of the time. I am so concerned with my own matters and affairs. But like John said in John 3:30: *"He must increase, but I must decrease."* That's what you and I must do. If we want the mind of Christ, we have to be willing to serve wherever and however the Lord wants us to serve. Love is NOT CONVENIENT. As I always tell you, LOVE WILL ALWAYS COST YOU SOMETHING. IT COSTS YOU YOUR TIME, YOUR TALENT, AND YOUR TREASURE.

Love calls on us at the most inconvenient times. It is when we are exhausted. It is when we have our own tasks to do. It is when we have spent all of our money on ourselves and our own needs. Sometimes loving others means that we are going to go unappreciated. We might even get stepped on. It sometimes means that we're going to get hurt. It means that we might even be taken advantage of. That is just what it means to love one another like Jesus. Loving is not easy. It WILL cost you your time, your talents, and your treasure.

If we're ever going to be one with Him, then we have to act in selfless ways. He humbled Himself to death on the cross. This means that He was tortured, that He suffered, and that He died on that cross. The Christian life calls us to repeatedly be inconvenienced, and it opens us up to the real possibility of suffering. If you are living your life for yourself, you're not going to experience this kind of love and unity, because you'll be living your life according to the rules of the world. In the end, what will be missing is the joy we talked about that comes as part of the fruit of the Spirit that is listed in Galatians 5:22.

This word translated "empty" is ***"kenosis."*** What exactly does this mean? This term *kenosis* refers to the doctrine of how Jesus "emptied Himself" when He became a man in the flesh. Paul summarizes it in verse 7 of our text in Philippians 2, " *[7] but [He] made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men." (NKJV).* That Greek word "empty" is *kenoó.*

Scholars point out that the verse doesn't say that He "emptied" or "voided" Himself of His divine attributes. I've heard it said that he gave up nothing of His divine nature, rather He

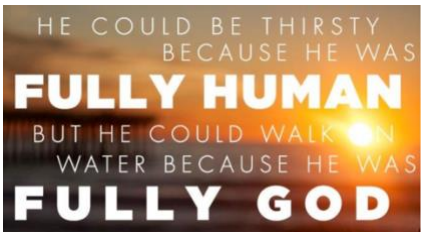
added to Himself the nature of being a man. That means that Jesus still had the power and wisdom of God within Him. We know this because of the miracles that He performed. A person cannot calm a storm or walk on water without something divine going on. He did not cease to be God and He was not some sort of lesser God. Scripture tells us that Jesus in fact remained "fully God." [9] *For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. (Colossians 2:9, NKJV).* We must realize that whatever He emptied Himself of, He was still fully God.

Perhaps the best way to think of it is that Jesus laid aside certain privileges that He had in heaven. He chose to leave His throne and "make Himself as nothing." When He came to earth, He gave up His divine privileges and His divine position and became a slave. He hid His glory for a time period. There are instances in history of kings who would change their clothes, and go out among their subjects incognito. They hid their identities to go out and walk among the commoners. Maybe that's a good way of looking at what went on with Jesus.

A few years ago, I read the biography of Peter the Great of Russia. It was absolutely amazing. Peter had an unquenchable desire to modernize Russia. Before he came along, Russia was still sort of in the middle ages. They had no modernization, no navy, no anything. They were xenophobic (afraid of any outsiders). They were living like the rest of Europe had lived around 1,000 AD. His soldiers wore ancient uniforms and long beards sort of like the crusaders of old. Peter realized the need to go modern in order for Russia to survive. Russia had always been a kingdom closed to the west of Europe, and Peter was the person determined to change that. It was time for Russia to come out of the dark ages and find its way into the modern era.

Peter hatched a plan. He created a great delegation of ambassadors who were to go to Europe and visit all of the museums and scientific displays to gain an understanding of how the rest of the world worked. He was desperate to find ways of innovation that had come to the western world through enlightenment. Peter was concerned that some of the countries that the delegation would visit, might not be so transparent. He figured they might really be closed if the Russian Emperor were to show up. So, Peter took on another name and a whole new persona. He dressed like a commoner and took part in the delegation as a lowly sergeant. He was "sent" to ship-building school. He lowered himself to becoming a common carpenter and worked under others to learn the trade of building ships and mastering carpentry. I'm not sure if anyone recognized him for who he was, but he "emptied" himself of the privileges of being the King of Russia (the Tsar). He STILL was the Tsar, but he disciplined Himself, leaving his throne to become a common man among common men. He still had all the authority of being the Tsar of Russia, and he had total awareness that he was in fact the king, but he laid those privileges aside. I think that's a pretty good picture of what Jesus did when He came to earth in human form.

Like Peter the Great who did not empty himself of his "royal status," Jesus did not empty Himself of His "divine nature." He did not exchange being God for being human. Jesus was always God from the moment He was born in the stable in Bethlehem. He set aside His heavenly glory and He refrained from using His divine power to make His way easier as a human. During His walk on earth, He submitted Himself to the will of the Father (John 5:19). We cannot exactly understand that part because, in reality, the Divine Trinity is inexplicable.



As part of His *kenosis*, He sometimes had the limitations of being a human. We know from scripture, for example, that He experienced hunger and thirst (John 4:6; 19:28). Being omniscient, God knows all, but He hasn't experienced all. Back when we studied the passage about Abraham being willing to sacrifice Isaac, right before he was ready to slay his son we read, *"11 But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" So he said, "Here I am." 12 And He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him;* ***for now I know that you fear God****, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." (Genesis 22:11-12, NKJV).* God knows all things. He is omniscient, but at that point He **experientially knew** that Abraham did indeed believe in and fear God.

Before Jesus came to earth, God had not experienced all things as a human. That happened in the personhood of Jesus Christ. We know that even at certain times, the person of Jesus gave up His omniscience (knowing everything). Remember when He was talking about the end of times, He said, *"36 "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only." (Matthew 24:36, NKJV).* At other times in His ministry, we know that Jesus exercised all the power of His omniscience (Luke 6:8; John 13:11; 18:4). This is all part of a mystery of God that we can't fully understand.

There have been false teachers who take the concept of *kenosis* too far. They say that Jesus gave up all or some of His divine nature when He came to earth. This heresy is sometimes referred to as the *kenosis* theory, but a better way to call it would be *kenoticism* or *kenotic theology*, to distinguish it from the biblical understanding of *kenosis*.

Many religious cults get hung up on all of this, and build their belief systems on the idea that Jesus is really not God; not the God Yahweh. The Mormons claim he is simply a human, who is in fact the brother of Satan, and that Jesus progressed toward being a god Himself (and so can we). The Jehovah's Witnesses also relegate Jesus to some status less than the God of the universe. He is merely one of many "sons of God." They put much stock in the name "Jehovah" which doesn't even exist in the Hebrew Bible. It is a contrivance made by combining the Hebrew letters of the words "Yahweh" and "Adonai;" meaning God and Lord respectively. Colossians 2:9 reasserts the truth of His divinity: ***"For in him (Jesus Christ) the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily…" (NRSV).*** And there you have it. The FULLNESS OF DEITY MEANS THE FULLNESS OF DEITY. It means that all that God is dwelt within the God-Man Jesus.

When it comes to the *kenosis*, we often focus too much on what Jesus gave up. The *kenosis* (emptying) also deals with what Christ took on. Jesus gave up nothing of His divinity, rather He **added a human nature to His divine nature as He humbled Himself for us**. Jesus went from being known and recognized as the King of All Kings and the Lord of All Lords, to being a lowly servant who was put to death on a cross. We read the "end-game" of this decision to humble Himself. *7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, <u>He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross</u>. (Philippians 2:7-8, NKJV).* In the ultimate act of humility, the God of the universe became a human being and died for His creation.

In summary, unity is near to the heart of God. We as humans want our own way. We have our own agendas. We want things done our way. Jesus was fully God before the *kenosis*. He was fully God after the *kenosis*. Jesus also became fully human after *kenosis*. And what is so important about all of this? Paul is telling us that we should have (as much as we are able) that same kind of humility as we love one another. That's the whole point of him stating that hymn in this piece of scripture. Paul is trying to tell us to observe that attitude of humility that we see in Jesus and somehow try to live that out in our own lives.

Thinking back on that example of Peter the Great, we might imagine if a king were to make war against another kingdom, he would have a royal right to stay in the safety of his palace. But he might choose to give up that right and to suit up in his armor and take his place as a soldier on the battlefield. That doesn't mean that he is no longer a king. It means that now he is both a king and a soldier. Peter the Great was both the Emperor of Russia and a ship-building carpenter. Jesus was ALL GOD and ALL MAN.

In verses 9-10, Paul references Isaiah 45:22-23.

"Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. 23 I have sworn by Myself; the word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that to Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath. (NKJV).

Friends who are reading this or hearing this sermon, let me tell you something. Every knee WILL bow and every tongue WILL confess that Jesus is Lord. Have you done this? If you haven't; you will. Why not get that taken care of this day!

Let us pray.

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 (Edited and proofed by Amanda Neese- Webster, Texas.) All financial gifts to this ministry are tax-deductible as a 501 (c) (3) Corporation.